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ABSTRACT

The teaching strategy for one unit of a British Open University educational television series, "Personality Development and Learning," used audiocassettes and printed text as a means of examining broadcast television content. The teaching package contained the audiocassette, which combined academic comment with excerpts from the program soundtrack, and 14 pages of notes on the cassette, which included a sequence of still visual materials such as images from the program and essential exercise ingredients. Telephone interviews with 15 students brought out the following points of interest: (1) this strategy does not use video, an approach which can also work well but is more expensive and dependent on student access to video equipment; (2) studying with an audiocassette may be easier and more effective than studying with video; and (3) the embedding of the audiocassette element in the unit text led to its perception by students as relevant or essential material. Five frames of the visuals used are appended. (MES)

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Integrating Television and Audio-Cassettes

A Case Study of TV6, E206

Personality Development and Learning

Abstract

This paper describes the closely worked connections between text, television and audio-cassette materials on one section of E206. It discusses students' favourable responses to the use of Audio-Vision (cassette with extensive notes) as a means of examining broadcast television content.

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November 1985

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Integrating Television and Audio-Cassettes

A Case Study of TV6, E206

This paper describes a strategy used on E206, Personality Development and Learning to try and help students make more of one television programme (TV6 Learning Mathematics together). The approach appears to have worked rather well: students tend to perceive the television material as relevant and emphasised the educational value of television where this material is closely integrated into a course of study. The key to its success appears to be the way students are enabled, by the use of an audio-cassette, to re-examine one broadcast and are helped to explore the teaching point underlying its surface content.

1. The Teaching Package

The most distinctive feature of the teaching strategy I discuss, is the way TV6, audio-cassette 1, Side B, and its accompanying pages of notes, work in combination with Unit 14 Learning Mathematics, to carry the direct teaching. The teaching is distributed as follows:

TV6 contains illustrative material and in two senses of the word. It illustrates in a literal sense children at work in the classroom; we see them being given a mathematical problem, and see and hear how they reach their solutions to it. It illustrates in a more abstract sense, an approach to teaching mathematics which is discussed and argued for in the related course text - Unit 14.

Unit 14 is promoting a "Do, Talk and Record" model for teaching mathematics. The text contains 8 activities, six of which make direct reference to and draw upon the content of TV6, so as to elaborate upon and illustrate various teaching points. The remainder of the text contains frequent references to TV6 content.

The Audio-Cassette and its notes are used as a basis for some of the activities just refered to, and thus also draw upon TV6. The audio element combines academic comment with excerpts from the sound-track of TV6 - (e.g. children thinking aloud, or explaining their procedures in solving a mathematical problem). Meanwhile some 14 pages of cassette-notes provide a sequence of 'frames', each containing still visual material such as images from the programme and essential exercise ingredients. These 'frames' form a focus for student attention throughout the cassette lesson. The cassette is used primarily

to help students analyse various sequences in TV6.

This 'package' is unusual, less for the mix of ingredients it employs, more for the level of integration it achieves. The cross-references between media are explicit, numerous and detailed; the TV programme itself it used as a basis for student activities located both in Unit 14 and on Cassette 1.

2. Implications of the Study

The strategy for supporting this programme is interesting for a number of reasons:

1. It does not use video to help students interrogate what they see and hear. We know that this approach can work well (see AVMRG Paper 208 A case study of EM235), but that its success partly depends on students having home access to video equipment. Video cassettes are also expensive to distribute which makes them less viable on high population courses.

2. Back-up to the broadcast is provided by an audio-cassette and extensive accompanying notes with exercises. There is some suggestion in students' comments that studying with an audio-cassette - even where it is being used to examine television material is easier and more effective than studying with video. The difficulties of studying with television, whether cassetted or broadcast have been discussed in other papers. In the EM235 study (op cit) for example, I noted the problems students tend to experience in 'hearing' voice-over academic guidance; I recommended that even where video was being used as the delivery mode, that freeze-frames or blank screens would help students to pick-up key teaching points or instructions. The same problem was expressed very simply by one interviewee on this study who said about the television experience as a whole, "There's so much going on"; she went on to explain, that for this reason, despite having made a video-recording of TV6 (which obviously, she could stop and start as she wished), that the audio-cassette was more useful: it enabled her to key-in to the sound-track, undistracted by the rich visual imagery. Without such audio back-up, her technique was first to watch, then to replay television material and try to note down the commentary - a cumbersome and difficult task by all accounts, and she felt she still "missed a lot". I shall refer again later to the content of the E206 audio-cassette notes; suffice it to say here, that it presents visual material, including images directly taken

from TV6, and that this can be compared to the 'freeze-frame' television strategy I have just ment oned. Aside from this, I think we see in the E206 use of audio-vision (i.e. cassette plus notes) yet further endorsement for OU studies which have suggested that this combination is a powerful means of promoting active learning.

3. A third point of interest is the evident influence of this strategy on students' perceptions of the media used. The audio-cassette element is 'embedded' in the related unit (Unit 14), through in-text instructions about when to listen and follow-up discussions of the cassette activities. This has a knock-on effect for the television programme, and both media are perceived as relevant to the core teaching on this course. Perception by students of the 'relevance' of broadcasts continues to be a major problem for the O.U. It is quite clear from these E206 student's comments for example, that discussions about the role and function of broadcasts in course preambles, or even passing references to a 'related' programme in a unit text do not serve to convince students that these programmes contain 'essential' teaching or are necessarily "relevant" to the course. It seems that to activate these perceptions students expect and need to be encouraged to devote 'prime' study time to the issues raised by broadcasts. Supplementary material alone, even quite detailed notes, providing pre-viewing and post-viewing comments or questions, tends not to satisfy these requirements either. E206, TV6 on the other hand was perceived as high status material because it was used in the Unit Text, and the audio-cassette was the main agency for helping students to engage with its content.

These are the general points I have extrapolated from telephone interviews with 15 E206 students carried out in October 1985. During the interviews we explored the problems of working with television, both in broadcast and cassette form since these tended to be at the forefront of students' minds. Their comments were not unusual, tending rather to support accumulated OU research into these media, and students' perceptions of their role on OU courses. Comparisons between audio-cassettes, broadcast television and video entered into the debate, because many of my contacts owned video equipment and had recorded E206 TV programmes. None of them however made much effective use of these recordings. Either they found little time to do so, had little inclination to do so or, in the case of TV6, they took the 'easier' option of using an audio-cassette to gain/regain access to the television material. But comparisons between media aside, a general point of principle is further endorsed by these students' comments - it is that administrative arguments about the difficulties

of integrating television into O.U courses need careful re-examination. From a student perspective this is the tail wagging the dog. The educational arguments for continuing to pursue ways and means of integrating television so as to help students to make more use of broadcasts should surely take precedence.

This begs the whole question of course about the educational value to students of some of our TV material. Students may be rather wise in their general perception of much O.U. TV as 'interesting', and 'technically superb' but as strictly speaking 'non-essential'. I have noticed an increasing tendancy for students not merely to shrug this opinion to one side (justified or not) but to voice concern about the expense of television and ultimately (they argue) of O.U. courses to them. Rather ironically, TV6 on E206, was criticised by some students on the grounds that the related audio-cassette alone adequately illustrated its teaching point. There was a general feeling that perhaps the course team had used a sledge-hammer to crack a nut in this instance, and been over-repetitive.

To explain this, I need to refer you back to the content of TV6 and to say more about its associated cassette. In my view, and that of the students I interviewed about this programme, the television sound-track - i.e. the childrens' explanations - is our prime learning focus and not the visual imagery. Indeed, some students missed the TV programme itself but nevertheless felt able to gain imaginative access to the classroom scenes via the audio-cassette alone. This is partly because the audio-cassette includes extracts from the sound-track from the televised programme. We thus hear the children explaining how they reached their solutions. It could be argued then that this particular TV programme lends itself to an audio-cassette back-up and that the combination would not work so well in other instances. This clearly needs to be looked into further, but an impression remains that the combination has considerable potential.

We know for example that 'real life' case-study material presented on broadcast television presents particular study problems for students, and E206 suggests a way of providing valuable analytical support to this type of programme. In my view other types of TV programme would also benefit from the E206 approach.

Of critical importance here would be the use of appropriate still visuals to accompany the audio-cassette sound track.

I have attached as an appendix to this paper, three pages of the visuals used on E206. They indicate the range of images students might be given to help them to

focus on the teaching and to engage actively with it. For example, in frame one, there is a 'still' from the TV programme itself, (a strategy also used on EM235, and one which students reportedly believed helped them to recall substantial 'nuggets' of what they had seen and heard). In frames 3, 4 and 5 there is visual reinforcement of key words heard on the sound track; in frame 6, the notes are used as the basis for an activity. Nick James author of unit 14 and presenter of TV6 talks students through these visuals, and E206 students observed how this provides a rather powerful sense of a joint tutor-student activity. One final general point is, I think, worth emphasising here; it is that simultaneous listening and looking at still images in itself constitutes a valuable learning activity. Exercises or 'Activities' inserted into an audio-cassette programme are not essential for students to feel 'actively' engaged in some valuable studying. Indeed getting such activities 'right' for all or most students appears to be rather difficult. Particularly suspect seem to be 'revision' type activities, and formative ones which, rather laboriously, seek to make a point easily grasped by students imagining rather than doing something. It is then, the 'redoing together' and 'with a tutor' which looks to be one of the most promising ways of using audio-vision to drive home the teaching content presented at first instance on television.

Cassette 1, Side B, Part 2: Learning Mathematics

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the three cassette set which is contained in Unit 12 Learning Mathematics.

Each of these activities requires you to listen to children's explorations in mathematics lessons and analyse the learning that is taking place. These sequences are taken from the soundtrack of the television material shown in TV6 - 'Learning Maths together'. You should check the time and date of the broadcast of TV6 and plan your timetable accordingly.

During the audio-tape sequences, Nick James asks you to look at the 'frames' pictured in the cassette notes booklet. In this, as you listen, you can also see the display of physical apparatus to which the children are referring. Occasionally you will be asked to pause the tape and write down your response to certain situations depicted in some of the frames. You should write your comments on the space provided in the frame.

Notes for Unit 12, Activity 2

FRAME 1

Craig, Paul, Jo Fumell, Lisa, Louisa, Rachel. 8

FRAME 3

12 beans
How many people get 3 each?

FRAME 4

FRAME 5 Paul and Craig's work card

24 beans
How many people get
3 each
4 each
6 each
5 each
8 each
12 each

FRAME 6

You'll need 24 objects before you start.... buttons, dried beans, paper clips ... anything will do. Get those now, then move them around to find your answer. Draw your arrangement of objects in the space below and then "write out the whole thing" just as the children's teacher asked.

Sketch your arrangement of 24 objects here:

'Write out the whole thing' here:

RESTART THE TAPE